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Plain language —

Part 1: Governing principles and guidelines

Langage clair et simple —

Partie 1: Principes directeurs et lignes directrices

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*.

A list of all parts in the ISO 24495 series can be found on the ISO website.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

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Introduction

Plain language is communication that puts readers first. It considers:

— what readers want and need to know;

— readers' level of interest, expertise and literacy skills;

— the context in which readers will use the document.

Plain language ensures readers can find what they need, understand it and use it. Thus, plain language focuses on how successfully readers can use the document rather than on mechanical measures such as readability formulas.

Extensive studies have shown that writing in plain language saves time or money (or both) for readers and organizations. Plain language is more effective and produces better outcomes. In addition, readers prefer plain language. For organizations, plain language is an important way to build trust with the readers. Finally, the process of translating is more efficient for plain language documents than for documents that are difficult to understand.

This document will help authors develop documents that communicate effectively with their intended readers. It applies to most written languages and reflects the most recent research on plain language and the experience of plain language experts. See Reference [3] for research on plain language.

Plain language is not to be confused with easy language. Plain language can be used for a general audience, while easy language is used for people who have difficulties with reading comprehension. These difficulties can be caused by health conditions, not being fluent in the given language or other reasons.

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Plain language —

Part 1:
Governing principles and guidelines

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1 Scope

This document establishes governing principles and guidelines for developing plain language documents. The guidelines detail how the principles are interpreted and applied.

This document is for anybody who creates or helps create documents. The widest use of plain language is for documents that are intended for the general public. However, it is also applicable, for example, to technical writing, legislative drafting or using controlled languages.

This document applies to most, if not all, written languages, but it provides examples only in English.

While this document covers the essential elements of plain language, it has some intentional limits, as follows:

— It does not cover all types of communication. It applies only to printed or digital information that is primarily in the form of text.

NOTE 1 However, creators of other types of communications, such as podcasts and videos, can find this document useful.

— It does not include existing technical guidance about accessibility and digital documents, although the guidance can apply to both.

NOTE 2 For guidance on accessibility, authors of digital documents can consider the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines[4] and EN 301 549.[2]

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at https://www.electropedia.org/

3.1
plain language
communication in which wording, structure and design are so clear that intended *readers* (3.2) can easily

— find what they need,

— understand what they find, and

— use that information

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